

Improving Water Quality in the Ocoee River (TN)

EPA Region 4-Atlanta

Geographic location or area of activity: North Potato Creek and Davis Mill Watersheds, Tennessee

Description of activity: Less than five years ago, North Potato Creek and Davis Mill Creek in southeastern Tennessee were impacted by high inflows of dissolved iron. The creeks drain the Copper Basin mining region where, for over 150 years, copper mining and sulfuric acid production caused miles of barren, eroded landscape.

In 2001, EPA Region 4, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), and Glenn Springs Holdings (GSH), a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum Corporation (OXY USA), voluntarily signed a series of agreements to address the Copper Basin environmental issues. In the following six years, Glenn Springs Holdings refurbished the water treatment plant on Davis Mill; constructed a new water treatment plant on Davis Mill Creek; removed PCB contaminated equipment and soils; removed, segregated, and covered acid-producing mining wastes; capped lead-contaminated mining wastes and constructed over six miles of fence to prevent access to physical hazards, such as mine collapses. All of this was done in record time through collaboration between GSH, EPA Region 4 and TDEC.

Today water quality in the Ocoee River has greatly improved; the rocks in and along the river are no longer stained orange with iron oxides, and fish and invertebrates are being seen in greater numbers. The landscape is greening with new growth of trees and other plants, and is no longer exporting sediments and contaminated water to the Ocoee.

Interagency partners: USEPA Region 4 and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)

Local partners: Glenn Springs Holdings (GSH), OXY USA